



## **ASIA/INDIA - Threats of violence against Christians in Orissa: the Bishop informs the authorities, supervised celebrations at Christmas**

Bhubaneswar (Agenzia Fides) - Christmas will be celebrated "with prudence and vigilance", and the Bishop advises the faithful to "call the police for any celebration": this is how, local sources of Fides report, Christmas will be lived in Orissa, while the Christians fear a new wave of violence.

In the district of Kandhamal, the scene in 2008 of anti-Christian massacres, in fact, a "general strike" has been called that could easily turn into a wave of violence against Christians: this is the alarm that is reported to Fides by the faithful of the Archdiocese of Cuttack -Bhubaneswar, seeking protection from the authorities in order to peacefully celebrate Christmas.

The "Kui Samaj Seva Samity", an organization that provides social services to tribal people, supported by the Hindu extremist group "Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh" (RSS, "National Volunteer Corps") has announced a strike from December 24 to 27, protesting the failure to the allocation of funding assistance from the government. The announcement caused panic among the Christians, recalling a similar event in December 2007 which led to mass violence and the killing of five Christians.

In a note sent to Agenzia Fides, Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar, His Exc. Mgr. John Barwa, SVD, said: "We have informed the administration of Kandhamal district and the police of the imminent risk, asking to take precautions. We have been assured that order will be maintained. However, we must remain cautious at all times". The Archbishop told Fides about the current situation in Kandhamal district, where, because of the violence in 2008, there were more than 90 Christians killed and 56 thousand displaced people: "Three years have passed since the anti-Christian violence in Kandhamal took place. Despite the loss of lives, destruction of property and suffering, we as a Christian community, will continue to move forward in our mission and witness of faith. Kandhamal appears to be quiet, even if incidents of harassment occur, intimidation and even murder. In some places Christians are threatened and forced to convert to Hinduism or to flee. Other faithful face social and economic discrimination".

"In the background of these events - the Archbishop concludes - we must be careful and remain vigilant. Since we are in view of Christmas, we invite all the faithful to take adequate precautions to celebrate Christmas and to keep a certain pastoral prudence. I advise to inform the police about the celebrations, on the occasion of Christmas and in the days to come". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 22/12/2011)